

SELF-DISCIPLINE *

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WHEN the council's letter came, asking me to write a paper on "Self-Discipline" for this meeting, many things passed through my mind, and many nurses passed before me who had been helped to become efficient, capable, trustworthy workers, holding prominent positions in the nursing world, by encouraging this strong factor—self-discipline.

It is not of rapid growth, but slow, though sure to bear good fruit. It begins with an ability to bear disappointment with cheerfulness and self-poise and continues on through life; for, once acquired, it becomes a part of one's self—a strong, character-building quality, bringing out one's reserve force in the hour of need.

Self-discipline should be taught early in the nurse's course; she should be told, when a probationer, that self-restraint and self-reliance are needful, that she must put forth her best efforts, make up her mind that nothing short of the best she is capable of will be acceptable to those in authority, and that she must succeed.

A proper amount of encouragement should be given, while the nurse is made to feel that she is being observed and her work criticised for her good. She should accept criticism as it is meant,—in friendliness. We must make the woman in her feel that where much is expected, much must be given; for we give that which is expected of us, whether much or little, if we are in earnest. Whatever we are satisfied with is our portion from others.

Again and again we need self-discipline to reconcile us to duty. Who does not at times fret at work to be accomplished? A duty calls, we attend to it; we think we can rest, be free from care; but an emergency arises obliging us to continue our numerous cares, and we seem to have strength given to us to go on—I had almost said indefinitely—before the rest we have been looking forward to can be attained. We are never free from responsibility in some form or other after we have reached the years of discretion. Duty after duty and care after care are ever before us. Disappointments must be met with a smile, or possibly a sigh. When we would be free and amused, we must be ready to accept the commands of circumstances, which are always changing and urging us to our utmost efforts.

Accordingly, self-discipline becomes a part of our character and of

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our moral life. It helps us to bear our trials and tribulations with fortitude and equanimity.

In training our nurses I do not know how this lesson can be taught with impressiveness except by precept and example. Let the nurse understand that when a duty has been given her to perform, no matter how difficult or unpleasant, she must act from a high sense of responsibility and perform that duty as faithfully as though she felt the eyes of the doctor or those of her superintendent upon her.

Self-discipline tends to make the nurse self-reliant, it gives her a truer insight of the work, and she works from a higher motive and with a clear and distinct knowledge that nothing but her best efforts will avail. She will never be automatic or machine-like in carrying out orders, a fault often complained of—justly or otherwise. Her sympathy for the patient will cause her to be gentle, thoughtful, and tactful.

Self-discipline strengthens sympathy. She has become more sympathetic through self-discipline; without sympathy, she is without the very key-note of nursing, which depends upon sympathy for success,—not the sympathy that simply expresses a *wish* to do something to relieve, but the good, practical sympathy that puts one's hand into one's pocket, as it were, and *does* something that is really helpful.

Let the nurse feel that her success depends on her ability to overcome her own physical desires; that she must be willing to give up many comforts—even needed rest, if necessary—when duty demands her services.

She has entered upon a work where human lives are at stake, and nothing should interfere with her assuming all the responsibilities of such a work and life. It is no slight undertaking, but the work of a strong, vigorous nature, toned down by experience and the successful overcoming of one's self. She is a wise nurse who learns this early and profits by the teaching.

If we are to study, we must have in mind the end to be attained. We must seek to know all that relates to our special work.

We shall not reach perfection,—unfortunately, that is not to be attained,—but we may approach perfection, and that principally by our own efforts towards character-making. That every victory over one's self opens possibilities for further victories is well known. The self-disciplined nurse will always be in demand. In the hospital ward, as she assumes one post of responsibility after another, she will be recognized by the quiet order which prevails, by her gracious dignity, and the manner in which she appeals to the best in her assistants. Her influence is greater than she may know, and there is an atmosphere of peace and order that seems natural to that ward. Her own grievances

and trouble are not allowed to appear in the ward, and no one is aware that the head nurse is sick or upset in any way. Thus, by keeping good control of herself she conquers all obstacles and is looked up to and loved and honored by those connected with her. When she enters the homes of others as private nurse, seeking to make a reputation for her own future welfare, she will be a comfort to those in grief or trouble by her calm personality and the quiet self-control which leads the weary and heart-sick members of the family to rely on her and to put their burden on her strong shoulders, feeling that she is to be trusted until they can take it up again. She may never realize what she has been to those in affliction, but they will always remember her. Her position in the hospital has neither made her arbitrary nor domineering, but has brought out and developed those qualities that are purely womanly, that she may have been unconscious of possessing. It will never be said of her that she is lacking in sympathy or tactfulness. Her very presence will be a blessing in the household of the suffering.

I do not doubt it will take years to acquire the self-control and self-poise so necessary to develop the self-disciplined nurse.

THE ESSENTIALS OF BACTERIOLOGY *

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A PART of your education as nurses has been neglected, unless you possess some little knowledge of the bacteria,—on one hand, our deadliest enemies; on the other, our warmest friends. To you the medical profession intrusts the lives of its patients, and it is well that you should know the nature of the cause of the ills which you seek to cure.

It has been said that the bacteria are, on the one hand, our deadliest enemies, and, on the other, our most valued friends. Let me emphasize this; let me illustrate more clearly. The causes of almost all diseases have been proved to be bacteria,—for example, diphtheria, scarlatina, pneumonia, tuberculosis, erysipelas, all kinds of pus, and a host of others. These we must fight as long as we live, and the length of our lives, in the majority of instances, depends upon which has the stronger sustaining power, the bacteria or ourselves. It is another phase of the Darwinian axiom of the survival of the fittest. And yet were it not for the bacteria there could be no vegetation, no animal life, no life of any sort,—only a

* Read to the nurses of the Norfolk Protestant Hospital.